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Subject: California Water News - Wednesday, September 16, 1998 (pt 1)

California Water News - Wednesday, September 16, 1998
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CALFED

Metropolitan Board Ratifies CALFED, Bay-Delta Policy Position
MWD Press Release - September 15, 1998

LOS ANGELES--Improved source water quality and increased public health protection top Southern California demands for a long-term solution to the San Francisco Bay/Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, under a definitive policy statement adopted today by Metropolitan Water District's board of directors.

Stressing the need for a balanced approach, the MWD position responds to the recent actions of the CALFED program, the joint state/federal process aimed at solving the Bay-Delta's various problems.

"While Metropolitan remains committed to the CALFED program, the district is clearly concerned about the direction CALFED has taken in the past few months. The current approach offers few benefits for urban California," said MWD Chairman John V. Foley.

"We feel compelled to clarify the district's position following CALFED's shift away from moving ahead with a technically superior alternative to a phased decision-making approach that offers no clear commitment to provide water quality and reliability benefits," said Foley, who also serves on CALFED's Bay-Delta Advisory Council.

The position ratified today marks Metropolitan's first comprehensive policy statement regarding the CALFED program since the state/federal partnership began in 1995 to develop a long-term Bay-Delta solution. In May, the board adopted revised policy principals to guide the district through the CALFED process.

Most recently, CALFED has been developing a preferred program alternative and revising the draft environmental document it released in March. The MWD board action follows CALFED's recent move to postpone a formal decision about structural changes in the Bay-Delta for another seven years, effectively delaying planning for facilities that could greatly improve source water quality.

The three-page position paper outlines Metropolitan's objectives and concerns for a CALFED package. MWD's position resolves that Southland urban water suppliers will support a CALFED solution only if its package contains needed water quality improvements in Bay-Delta water, which will provide increased public health protection.

The position includes two commitments from Metropolitan to the CALFED program: continued Southern California investments in water conservation and recycling programs; and reduced reliance on Bay-Delta supplies during dry years.

Metropolitan and its member agencies have taken significant steps to maximize local resources and lessen the region's dependence on Bay-Delta supplies. Metropolitan has invested more than \$130 million in conservation and recycling programs, which is matched by even greater local agency investments. Today, the Southland conserves and recycles more than 700,000 acre-feet of water a year, more than twice the amount of water used annually in the city of San Francisco.

In addition, Metropolitan has developed groundwater storage programs in its six-county service area and California's Central Valley, totaling more than 800,000 acre-feet. MWD's plans also call for expanded groundwater programs, as well as another 300,000 acre-feet provided through voluntary water transfers from the Central Valley to be used primarily during dry years. An acre-foot is nearly 326,000 gallons, about the amount of water used by two typical Southland families in and around their homes in a year.

"We, however, want to make it clear that water quality improvements that will reduce salinity must first be guaranteed to ensure continuous recycling of water or even blending with our other water sources," Foley said.

Along with the stated commitments, the MWD position outlines what Metropolitan and its 27 member public agencies are willing to provide, as well as what MWD believes CALFED must provide as part of an overall Bay-Delta solution. The consequences of CALFED failure also are detailed in the position paper.

"Metropolitan continues to believe CALFED offers the best hope for addressing the Bay-Delta's environmental, water quality and supply reliability problems," Foley said. "But we will not commit to any proposed solution package that fails to address the Southland's needs at an affordable cost." ##

MWD decries delay on Delta canal

San Diego Union-Tribune - Wednesday, September 16, 1998

By Steve La Rue, staff writer

Southern California's largest water agency protested yesterday that a state-federal agency charged with environmental restoration in the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta may be neglecting the future water needs of the state's southern half.

What prompted the letter of protest was a policy shift by the CalFed Bay Delta Project, a multiagency coalition lashed together in 1995 to restore the ecology of the huge estuary east of San Francisco Bay. Another goal was to improve the quality and reliability of water delivered through the Delta to Southern California.

Instead of deciding this year whether to build a 44-mile canal around the Delta's eastern fringe to partly accomplish this, CalFed now intends to postpone the politically sensitive canal decision for five years or more.

"We are deeply concerned that (this) puts off making difficult, but crucial decisions regarding the long-term, best solution to problems in the Bay Delta," directors of the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California said in the letter they sent yesterday.

MWD supplies water to 27 member agencies serving 16 million people. The San Diego County Water Authority is the MWD's largest customer, drawing up to 95 percent of its supply from MWD, depending on rainfall.

MWD has already advanced \$30 million from Southern California water customers for Delta environmental improvements, said Stephen Arakawa, MWD assistant chief of planning and resources.

"We are not going to walk away from CalFed. We want to be sure that our needs are being met, we want to be sure that we get CalFed's attention," he said.

"To just say, 'We are going to decide on that later' -- that is not good enough for us. We need to have more certainty than that."

Under CalFed's current approach, so-called soft-path improvements would be

made in the Delta over the next several years to allow southbound water to move through the Delta with minimal environmental damage, said CalFed spokeswoman Valerie Holcomb.

The decision on building the canal, or "isolated facility," would be made up to seven years into the future, and then only if the soft-path approaches do not meet water-quality and other goals that CalFed has yet to develop, Holcomb said.

"The isolated facility is the last resort for achieving public health and fish recovery goals," she said.

Northern California has looked on any such canal as a giant straw that could siphon more and more of its water south. The MWD argues that the canal is needed now because it can deliver water with fewer organic compounds.

Organics in water that comes through the Delta now mix with chlorine disinfectants to produce a class of pollutants that may cause cancer or increase miscarriages. ##

South state water district pushes for peripheral canal

Sacramento Bee - Wednesday, September 16, 1998

By Nancy Vogel, Bee Staff Writer

The biggest and most influential water district in California on Tuesday demanded cleaner water from the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta -- and said a peripheral canal may be the best way to get it.

In a move that heats up the decades-old debate about whether California needs a canal to send Sacramento River more directly south, the board of the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California voted to send a message to government water leaders that they want a peripheral canal taken seriously -- and soon.

The MWD vote is meant to pressure CalFed, a team of federal and state water leaders crafting a 30-year plan to make the Delta a more reliable source of water and safer migration route for endangered salmon. Water for 20 million people and millions of acres of farmland are diverted by water project pumps at the southern edge of the Delta, near Tracy.

In recent years, Delta water has made up nearly half the water that MWD wholesales to 16 million people.

In July, CalFed leaders announced that they would put off a decision on building a Delta canal. Instead, they would invest in environmental restoration, water conservation and less engineered solutions for at least seven years. If that failed to improve water quality and salmon runs, then, under the CalFed plan, work could begin on a 42-mile canal to divert Sacramento River water in a half-circle starting a few miles south of Sacramento and ending at the Tracy pumps.

CalFed leaders call the canal an "isolated facility" to distinguish it from the infamous peripheral canal that Northern California voters shot down by 9-to-1 in 1982. CalFed's proposal would carry less water but look much the same.

MWD leaders note CalFed called the canal the "technically superior" option. They accuse CalFed leaders of going slow on a canal to appease environmentalists and Delta residents, who fear a canal will starve the Delta's sloughs and San Francisco Bay of freshwater flows.

Tim Quinn, MWD's assistant general manager, said his agency has made a huge investment in environmental restoration,

conservation, recycling, groundwater storage and many other CalFed goals, and now CalFed leaders need to know that "if they don't provide improved drinking water quality, there's nothing in it for urban California."

In 1982, MWD supported a peripheral canal as a way to boost Southern California water supplies. But now the focus is on water quality.

Compared to water supplies across the nation, Delta water contains high levels of salts and organic matter that generate possible cancer-causing byproducts when disinfected for drinking. A state study in February also tied such byproducts to miscarriages among pregnant women who drank large quantities of tap water.

MWD officials insist that the water they sells meets standards. But they fear even a huge investment in better treatment won't allow them to meet tighter rules the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is expected to issue in November.

The best way to guarantee clean water, many urban water district leaders say, is to tap the Sacramento River north of the Delta, before water can be contaminated by the Delta's peat soils and ocean tides.

But one Bay Area environmentalist said MWD is getting too nervous too soon.

"It's always significant when MWD speaks; MWD is a powerful player," said Gary Bobker of the Bay Institute in Sausalito. "In this case I think they're overplaying their hand a little bit. CalFed is putting a lot of energy into meeting their needs."

Bobker said a panel of water quality experts convened by CalFed recently concluded that cleaner source water may not be needed to meet future standards, and the issue deserves more study.

"We don't know enough to say that if we spend a couple of billion dollars on an isolated facility it's the right answer," he said. "Just as we can't say we don't need it."##

RECYCLING

Editorial-Unsafe for wallets: Purified sewage water is truly waste
San Diego Union-Tribune - Wednesday, September 16, 1998

A lot of San Diegans are grossed out by the notion of putting purified sewage into our drinking water.

It's safe for our health, according to several studies, the latest being a national panel of water experts. But it's not safe for our wallets.

The cost of purifying sewage is what's truly gross. For the city to spend \$154 million on a sewage repurification project -- enough money to build a beautiful downtown library -- would be a ridiculous waste of taxpayer dollars.

Purifying sewage to drinking water standards costs about \$1,200 per acre-foot. Currently, we buy water from Northern California and the Colorado River for about \$450 per acre-foot. And San Diego County has just signed an agreement to begin importing an additional 200,000 acre-feet of fresh water annually -- about half of our current total usage -- from the Imperial Valley.

What's more, the Imperial Valley water deal is the forerunner of other agreements to transfer more agricultural water to cities. The Central Valley, Sacramento Valley and Imperial Valley farming areas of California hold rights to vast amounts of imported fresh water, a fraction of which could provide for all